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USDA FOR FAS/OA, FAS/DLP, FAS/ICD AND FAS/ITP
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SUBJECT: APRIL 24 NIGERIA AVIAN FLU UPDATE

REF: ABUJA 659

11. (SBU) Summary. The GON is losing its sense of urgency on AI. The GON appears to be moving toward adopting the line that Nigeria's AI crisis is more or less over. Lack of reporting on new outbreaks, previously attributable to weak surveillance, more recently appears also to be due to deliberate suppression of new information concerning outbreaks, by various federal and state level officials. The GON's AI public-education campaign has faded away and needs reinvigoration. AI has spread to 13 of Nigeria's 36 states and to the Federal Capital Territory. At least 758 farms/premises have been affected, and of poultry on affected farms, 288,662 died of AI and 414,403 were culled. Nigeria's upcoming rainy season, with its wetter and cooler climate, could lead to a resurgence of AI, because the virus fares worst in the country's current hot and dry weather. End summary.

12. (SBU) The Government of Nigeria (GON) is losing its sense of urgency on the avian influenza (AI). Nigeria's AI Crisis Management Center last issued a "news bulletin" on April 4. The GON's AI public-education campaign has faded away and needs reinvigoration. The GON appears to be moving toward adopting the line that Nigeria's AI crisis is more or less over. Some officials have declared that there have been no new outbreaks in recent weeks. In fact, new outbreaks. Mission personnel have heard of new outbreaks in Kano, Plateau and Bauchi states. In a visit to the Veterinary Lab in Vom, the Ag Attache got the impression that lab staff were under pressure to delay or withhold the release of information on recent test results. No results have been reported for a number of suspected outbreaks. The consensus is that small farmers are not reporting outbreaks, but eat any sick or dying birds. It may be true that the number of outbreaks has dropped off in recent weeks. Unofficial vaccination probably has reduced outbreaks in commercial flocks while the recent very hot dry weather is unfavorable to the spread of the virus. With the arrival late last weeks of the rainy season, with its wetter and cooler climate, there could be a resurgence of AI outbreaks.

13. (U) As currently reported, AI has spread to 13 of Nigeria's 36 states and to the Federal Capital Territory. At least 758 farms/premises have been affected in 30 local-government areas (LGAs), and culling was carried out in 33 LGAs. As of April 11, of chickens, ostriches, ducks, pigeons, turkeys, and geese on affected farms, 288,662 died of AI and 414,403 were culled, according to the United Nations/Nigeria. The GON so far has paid N107,639,866 (about USD 841,000) in compensation to poultry farmers. But according to the GON, these payments largely have gone to big commercial poultry farmers (58 farmers in Kano State, 59 farmers in Kaduna State, and 13 farmers in Plateau State).

14. (U) The agricultural attache led on April 12 a video conference on bird vaccinations with the U.S. Department of Agriculture/Washington and GON, UN, and U.S. Mission officials in Abuja. The group heard from top U.S. vaccination experts, both government and private, about the types of vaccines available, as well as case studies of countries that used bird vaccine and the lessons learned. The conference's objective was to encourage the GON to employ vaccination as one of the tools to combat the spread of AI. The GON, however, had valid concerns about poultry inoculations and later decided not to use bird vaccine. Nigerian commercial poultry farmers' current widespread but unapproved bird inoculations will render surveillance of AI more difficult, because of the vaccine's unmonitored presence in poultry.

15. (U) Two USAID/Nigeria officers and an Abuja economic officer attended the USAID Africa-wide avian flu conference in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, on April 4-6. They sought to convey to other attendees the difficulties Nigeria has encountered so far in combating AI.

16. (SBU) The donor group under UN leadership has prepared a document to look at the first three months of AI in Nigeria and to provide recommendations for action in the next three months. A joint UN/USAID/CDC delegation plans to meet with

the Ministers of Agriculture, Health and Information to raise concerns about fading GON focus on the AI problem. Among other things, USAID and the UN are working on a proposal for a joint GON/Donor operation center to manage the response to the AI epidemic and involve the states more directly in the response.

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